



Liberia

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2004](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
February 28, 2005

Liberia is a republic. The Constitution provides for three branches of government--executive, legislative, and judicial--but there has been no effective system of checks and balances, and presidents traditionally have wielded extraordinary power. In August 2003, the former government of Liberia and the country's two rebel groups--Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)--signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the 1999-2003 civil war. Prior to the signing of the CPA, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provided peacekeeping forces (ECOMIL) to separate the warring parties. In October 2003, U.N. Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) peacekeepers were deployed to further assist the peace process and provide stability during the post-conflict transition. In October 2003, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), headed by Chairman Charles Gyude Bryant and Vice Chairman Wesley Johnson, replaced the government of former President Charles Taylor, who fled into exile after being indicted for war crimes. By June, UNMIL had deployed more than 14,000 peacekeepers and 1,100 international police (CIVPOL) throughout the country. By October, more than 100,000 former combatants and camp followers had been disarmed and demobilized under the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Program (DDRR). During the year, the NTGL, which governed under a power sharing agreement with the CPA and remained highly centralized, extended its influence into rural areas; however, former LURD, MODEL, and government combatants retained some influence in those areas, even in areas with an UNMIL presence. During the year, the country's transition to democracy was hindered by widespread corruption, a severely damaged infrastructure, and continuing instability that delayed the return of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Elections to restore a constitutional government were scheduled for October 2005. The judiciary was subject to political influence, economic pressure, and corruption.

The country's security forces include the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), which are responsible for external security but also have domestic security responsibilities, the interim Liberian National Police (LNP), which have primary responsibility for law enforcement, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), which investigates crime, the Special Security Service (SSS), which provides executive protection, the National Security Agency (NSA), which is responsible for internal and external intelligence, and the Ministry of National Security, which assists the NSA and is responsible for investigating financial crimes. The AFL is under the Ministry of Defense, the LNP and NBI are under the Ministry of Justice, and the SSS, NSA, and Ministry of National Security are under the Office of the NTGL Chairman. There also were numerous irregular security services attached to certain key ministries and parastatal corporations that did not belong to a permanent, organized military force and whose responsibilities appeared to be poorly defined. Unlike in the previous year, civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces; however, there were some instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently of government authority. Under the NTGL, a few members of the security forces committed isolated human rights abuses.

The country, with an estimated population of approximately 3.4 million, was very poor with a market-based economy ravaged by the civil war. Few statistics were available; however, economic activity, particularly in the informal sector, visibly increased following the 2003-04 deployment of UNMIL forces throughout the country and the initiation of disarmament exercises. An estimated 80 percent of the population lived on less than \$1 per day, and the country had an unemployment rate of at least 70 percent. Most of the population survived on income generated through the informal sector, predominantly consisting of buying and selling clothing and household effects, and on remittances from relatives abroad. There was little industry, and agricultural production remained low due to security concerns in rural areas; however, unlike in the previous year, the Government generally paid civil servant salaries. The internal displacement of thousands of civilians throughout the countryside, particularly in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba Counties, the absence of police security, an increase in crime as former combatants sought alternative means of income, and the absence of infrastructure throughout the country continued to depress the economy, despite the country's rich natural resources and potential self sufficiency in food. Persons controlling former fighters continued to exploit the country's natural resources for personal profit. Extortion was widespread in all levels of society.

Prior to the resignation of President Taylor, the Government's human rights record remained poor, and security forces committed numerous, serious abuses; however, during the year, the Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, although problems continued in some areas. Interim LNP officers sometimes abused, harassed, and intimidated persons. Prison conditions remained harsh and sometimes life threatening. Corruption and official impunity were problems, and there was little investigation into abuses committed during the war. The LNP continued to use arbitrary arrest and detention, and lengthy pretrial detention was common. The judicial system was unable to ensure citizens' rights to due process and a fair trial. During the year, the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA) threatened to arrest persons who criticized the NTLA. In some rural areas where the judiciary had not been reestablished, clan chieftains administered criminal justice through the traditional practice of

trial-by-ordeal; however, unlike in the past, authorities did not tacitly condone the practice. Incidents of ritualistic killings persisted. Violence and discrimination against women were problems. The welfare of children widely remained neglected, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continued to be practiced. Societal ethnic discrimination remained widespread, and ethnic differences continued to generate violence and political tensions. Forced labor persisted in rural areas. Child labor remained widespread, and there were reports of forced child labor. There were reports of trafficking, and the Government obstructed the prosecution of a trafficking case during the year.

Some former rebel combatants continued to commit human rights abuses, including the arbitrary detention, extortion, theft, rape, and battery of civilians, particularly IDPs, forcible conscription, including of children, and the blocking of humanitarian assistance.

UNMIL peacekeepers, DDRR exercises, and CIVPOL's support for the interim LNP and training of a new police service improved security throughout the country and helped facilitate governmental efforts to improve human rights. Since the NTGL assumed power, there have been no reports that government security forces were responsible for unlawful killings, summary executions, disappearances, or torture. There have also been no reports that the Government restricted freedom of speech and of the press, detained and intimidated journalists, restricted freedom of movement, harassed human rights monitors, or discriminated against particular ethnic groups.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary and Unlawful Deprivation of Life

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of political or unlawful killings. In 2003, former government and rebel combatants killed an undetermined number of civilians, who were suspected of being rebel or government sympathizers respectively, by shooting them, burning them alive, or cutting their throats; numerous IDPs were killed during repeated raids on their camps. The NTGL took no steps to investigate any of the summary executions, killings, or other crimes committed during the 1999-2003 civil war.

During the year, CIVPOL investigators and human rights organizations uncovered evidence of serious human rights abuses committed by security forces in 2003. The bodies of 20 persons who appeared to have been executed were discovered at 7 locations in River Gee and Maryland counties. Government forces were believed to be responsible for the executions in six of the locations; MODEL forces were believed to be responsible in one. Six human skulls were found at a military base in Tubmanburg that was used by both LURD and MODEL forces. In February, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission reported evidence that in 2002, former government forces had massacred hundreds of civilians near Tubmanburg; men, women, and children reportedly were herded into trucks, killed, and dumped into a river.

General Benjamin Yeaten, who was believed to have executed or supervised the 2003 execution of former Deputy National Security Minister John Yormie and former Deputy Public Works Minister Isaac Vaye, remained in self-imposed exile at year's end; Yormie and Vaye were arrested in 2003 for alleged coup plotting against former President Taylor.

There were no developments in any of the following 2003 cases: The February AFL stabbing and killing of First Lieutenant Francis Sumo; the March ATU killing of Alex Boye; the alleged May killings by security forces of Sierra Leone rebel leader Sam "Mosquito" Bockarie and his family; and the May killing of SSS Officer Richard Taylor.

There were no developments in any of the 2002 reported cases of killings by security forces.

During the year, former government and rebel combatants were responsible for civilian deaths. For example, on March 20, a former MODEL fighter in Buchanan reportedly beat a civilian who refused to hand over his food; the civilian subsequently died.

On May 17, numerous former soldiers from the Taylor administration set up roadblocks, smashed cars, and looted shops during a demonstration to demand immediate payment of the remaining money from their resettlement grants; one person was killed, and four were injured.

The NTGL conducted no investigations into summary executions and other killings committed by MODEL, LURD, or other rebel elements during the civil war.

Incidents of ritualistic killings, in which human body parts used in traditional rituals were removed from the victim, occurred during the year (see Section 2.c.).

Mob violence exacerbated by ethnic conflict, religious differences, political divisions, vigilantism, and high unemployment resulted in deaths. For example, on September 13, a dispute between marketeers and criminals erupted into mob violence that resulted in at least one death, numerous injuries, and the looting and burning of buildings.

On October 28, a land dispute in Monrovia between Muslim Mandingos and Christian non-Mandingos erupted into a riot that resulted in 19 deaths, hundreds of injuries, and the looting and burning of businesses, mosques, and churches. UNMIL forces arrested approximately 250 persons on charges ranging from murder and arson to breaking an NTGL-imposed curfew. It was unclear whether the violence was triggered by religious conflict, ethnic differences, or other factors.

b. Disappearance

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of politically motivated disappearances. During the civil war, government security forces and rebels were responsible for numerous disappearances.

The welfare and whereabouts of former Chief of Intelligence Peterson Marbiah, who disappeared when John Yormie and Isaac Vaye were arrested in June 2003, remained unknown at year's end (see Section 1.a.).

The 15 persons abducted in September 2003 from Todee by former government militia remained missing at year's end.

Most of the ethnic Mandingo youths abducted between September 2002 and March 2003 by former government security forces for suspected involvement with LURD remained unaccounted for at year's end.

There were no developments in the numerous 2002 abductions by former government militiamen.

During the year, LURD claimed to have investigated the 2003 disappearance of foreign citizen Nabil Hage and uncovered no information surrounding the incident; Sekou Kamara, the LURD member who reportedly had been seen wearing Hage's army uniform, remained in self-imposed exile in Guinea at year's end. In December, UNMIL opened an investigation into the incident.

There were no developments in other 2003 and 2002 abductions by LURD.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices; however, in the past, police and security forces frequently tortured, beat, raped, and otherwise humiliated persons, particularly during interrogations of LURD detainees at Gbatala security training base. During the year, there were no reports of torture; however, interim LNP officers sometimes abused, harassed, and intimidated persons (see Section 1.d.).

Unlike in the previous year, security forces did not target or abuse critics of the Government, including journalists, students, and human rights activists.

During the year, former government and rebel combatants were responsible for civilian deaths and injuries (see Section 1.a.). During the first half of the year, former combatants with the Taylor administration, LURD, and MODEL harassed travelers, displaced persons, and humanitarian aid workers in areas not under UNMIL control. Demonstrations by former combatants to protest disarmament, UNMIL deployments, or the Government's failure to complete payment of resettlement grants resulted in deaths, injuries, and the looting of property (see Section 1.a.).

Former combatants who had reorganized as gangs subjected IDP populations to rape, battery, extortion, and theft (see Section 2.d.).

Sexual violence and rape were common during the civil war. According to Amnesty International, 73 percent of women over 18 who registered for DDRR reported some kind of sexual abuse. During the year, NGOs working in IDP camps reported incidents of rape, including the rape of children.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of civilian deaths and injuries as a result of violent clashes among rival security personnel.

The law prohibits trial-by-ordeal--commonly the placement of a heated metal object on a suspect's body in an attempt to determine whether the defendant is telling the truth; however, the practice reportedly continued in rural areas.

Mob violence during the year resulted in deaths and injuries (see Section 1.a.).

Prison conditions were harsh and in some cases life threatening; however, unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the Government operated unofficial detention facilities where detainees were tortured. The Government did not provide detainees or prisoners with adequate food or medical care. Cells at Monrovia Central Prison were overcrowded, mostly with detainees awaiting trial; however, during the year, international organizations began providing food and hygiene to the prison. In some counties, the structure that served as a jail was a container with bars at one end. There also were reports that local officials forced prisoners to work for them.

Women were held in separate cells in conditions comparable to those of the male prisoners and detainees. There were no separate facilities for juvenile offenders. Women and particularly juveniles were subject to abuse by guards or other inmates. Convicted prisoners and detainees awaiting trial were not held in separate facilities.

The Government permitted the independent monitoring of prison conditions by local human rights groups, the media, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Some human rights groups, including the ICRC, paid regular visits to detainees at police headquarters and prisoners at the Monrovia Central Prison.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, security forces continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily, although less frequently than in previous years.

During the year, CIVPOL assisted with the restructuring, recruitment, training, and equipping of an interim police force until a full replacement force could be trained. This interim LNP was staffed with police officers who served under the former Taylor administration, excluding those who were hired during that administration. The interim LNP operated independently and retained arrest authority; however, CIVPOL accompanied LNP officers in joint patrols around Monrovia.

There were reports of police brutality, particularly during demonstrations. Police handling of mob violence resulted in deaths (see Section 1.a.). Police had limited logistics and forensic capabilities and did not adequately investigate many crimes, including murder cases. When the courts released known criminals for lack of evidence, police officers often arrested them again on false charges. During the year, CIVPOL and UNMIL investigated some alleged abuses by the LNP, including reports that the Deputy Chief of the interim LNP was taking bribes; the Deputy Chief subsequently was dismissed. However, corruption remained widespread, and abusers were seldom charged or disciplined. Public confidence in the police remained low.

The Constitution provides for the rights of the accused, including warrants for arrests and the right of detainees either to be charged or released within 48 hours; however, warrants were not always based on sufficient evidence, and detainees, particularly those without the means to hire a lawyer, often were held for more than 48 hours without charge. The law also provides for bail, which was determined primarily by the severity of the alleged crime. The law provides for prompt access to counsel; however, the Government did not ensure such access for all detainees. In the past, security forces sometimes refused to produce suspects being held in detention without charges even after the courts issued writs of habeas corpus on the application of human rights organizations.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained journalists, NGO members, human rights activists, religious leaders, and students; however, there were a few arbitrary arrests, and the NTLA threatened to arrest persons who criticized the NTLA (see Section 2.a.).

Former rebel combatants arbitrarily arrested civilians and IDPs during the year. For example, in June, former LURD combatants in Tubmanberg detained a man for 3 days in a small metal cage and denied him food or water. In a separate incident, LURD combatants on August 1 reportedly assaulted one of five persons they had bound and left overnight on the Guthrie rubber plantation; the five were released the following day.

The Constitution provides for the right of a person who is charged to receive an expeditious trial; however, lengthy pretrial and pre-arraignment detention remained serious problems. In some cases, the length of the pretrial detention equaled or exceeded the length of sentence for the crime.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the Government used house arrest or held political detainees.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, judges were subject to political, social, familial, and financial pressures, and the judiciary was corrupt. Courts regularly received bribes or other illegal gifts out of damages that they awarded in civil cases. Defense attorneys often suggested that their clients pay a gratuity to appease judges, prosecutors, and police officers to secure favorable rulings. Some judges and magistrates were not lawyers. By statute members of the bar must be graduates of a law school and pass the bar examination; however, the judiciary determined that it was not feasible to retire all judicial personnel who were not legally trained. There were frequent reports of executive branch influence over the judiciary.

The judiciary is divided into four levels, with the Supreme Court at the apex. Unlike in the previous year, all levels of the court system in Monrovia, including the Supreme Court, operated regularly. The Government was unable to revitalize the court system outside of Monrovia due to the war and a lack of trained personnel, a lack of infrastructure, and inadequate funding. Although judges were assigned throughout the country, in some cases they were unable to hold court due to lack of security, supplies, or equipment. Traditional forms of justice administered by clan chieftains remained prevalent in some localities (see Section 1.c.).

Under the Constitution, defendants have due process rights; however, in practice these rights were not always observed. Defendants in criminal trials enjoy a presumption of innocence and have the right to an attorney, to confront witnesses in a

public trial, and to appeal adverse decisions; however, many of these protections were not available to defendants who could not pay bribes. There was no effective system to provide public defenders, especially in rural areas. Some local NGOs provided legal services to indigents and others who had no representation. There continued to be long delays in deciding cases involving juveniles.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the right of privacy and the sanctity of the home and requires that police obtain a warrant or have a reasonable belief that a crime is in progress, or is about to be committed, before entering a private dwelling; unlike in the previous year, when police and paramilitary officers entered private homes, churches, and newspaper offices without warrants, the Government generally respected these rights.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that security forces conducted cordon and search operations or entered homes and compelled local communities to provide food, shelter, and labor; however, security forces on occasion extorted money and goods from citizens. Former rebel combatants continued to compel communities to provide for them. For example, on January 25, approximately 50 former MODEL combatants entered the homes of the inhabitants of Timbo village and stole their food and money.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the Government surveilled opposition figures or monitored private communication.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that former government security forces forcibly conscripted men and boys, including IDPs; however, former rebel combatants continued the practice (see Sections 2.d. and 5).

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the Government arrested family members to persuade suspects to turn themselves in.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice, although less frequently than in previous years. Unlike in the past, there were no reports that security agents detained or assaulted journalists or that cabinet ministers forced journalists to drop or modify critical articles; however, during the year, the NTLA threatened to arrest persons who criticized the legislative body or refused to appear before it. In the past, there were reports of journalistic self-censorship; however, there were no such reports during the year. Unlike in previous years, the Government did not restrict academic freedom. The University of Liberia reopened in March.

In Monrovia, there were 18 newspapers that published during the year, with varying degrees of regularity. Two were independent dailies and five usually appeared at least once a week. Their political orientation ranged between criticism and support of the Government. All newspapers were printed through one printing facility; however, unlike in previous years, the Government did not pressure facility managers not to print critical articles.

Due to the high price of newspapers, the high rate of illiteracy (estimated at 75 percent), high transportation costs, and the poor state of roads elsewhere in the country, newspaper distribution generally was limited to the Monrovia region. As a result, radio was the primary means of mass communication.

There were at least five FM stations that regularly broadcast in Monrovia. Most stations broadcast daily from 5:00 a.m. to midnight. Call-in radio talk shows were popular and frequently a forum for both government and opposition viewpoints. Interviews with prominent persons were broadcast frequently. Unlike in the previous year, the Government did not pressure radio stations that broadcast critical views.

There were three local television stations; however, television was limited to those who could purchase sets, generators, and fuel to provide electricity. For those persons and businesses with satellite capability, CNN and BBC generally were available.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the Government harassed, arbitrarily arrested, or assaulted journalists who criticized the Government; closed or vandalized media outlets; threatened advertisers who did business with such outlets; required journalists to apologize in writing prior to releasing them; censored local reporting on the insurgency; or harassed international correspondents by suspending their credentials or imposing irregular accreditation fees.

No action was taken during the year against ATU forces responsible for the January 2003 torture of Throble Suah, a reporter for the Liberian Inquirer newspaper.

During the year, journalists reportedly extorted money from citizens by threatening to publish negative articles about them and accepted bribes from politicians to publish negative articles about their opponents.

The Government did not restrict access to the Internet.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no attacks on journalists by unknown persons, rebel abductions of journalists, or looting and burning of the homes of journalists.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, government security forces and UNMIL troops forcibly dispersed several violent demonstrations during the year (see Section 1.a.). In November, the NTGL announced that demonstrators would be required to seek permits from the Justice Ministry 72 hours before planned demonstrations; however, the policy was not enforced.

Interim LNP and UNMIL troops frequently used tear gas to disperse demonstrations during the year. There were reports of police brutality, particularly during demonstrations, and reports that UNMIL troops beat demonstrators.

In January and early March, violent student protests erupted when the University of Liberia, which had been closed since early 2003, failed to reopen, as promised; there were no reported injuries, and the University reopened in March.

No action was taken against security forces who forcibly dispersed and beat demonstrators in 2003.

The Constitution provides for the right of association, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There were 18 registered political parties. Dozens of civil society organizations, organized around themes such as human rights, women's issues, development objectives, poverty alleviation, health concerns, and worker's associations, were active.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. During the year, respect for religious freedom improved. Since taking office, the NTGL at all levels worked to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Unlike the former Taylor government, the NTGL did not harass, marginalize, or attempt to intimidate the Muslim population; however, religious differences between Muslims and Christians contributed to mob violence during the year.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the Government; however, traditional indigenous religious groups were not required to register, and generally did not do so. Registration was routine, and there were no reports that the registration process was burdensome or discriminatory in its administration.

Although the law prohibits religious discrimination, Islamic leaders complained of discrimination against Muslims. During the year, an increased number of Muslims held senior government positions; however, many Muslims believed they were bypassed for lower-level civil service positions. Many Muslim business proprietors believed that the Government's decision to enforce an old statute prohibiting business on Sunday discriminated against them.

Some tensions existed between the major religious communities. The private sector in urban areas, particularly in the capital, gave preference to Christianity in civic ceremonies and observances, and discrimination against followers of other organized religions affected areas of individual opportunity and employment. There was an interfaith council that brought together leaders of the Christian and Islamic faiths.

Ethnic, religious, and other differences between Muslim Mandingos and Christian non-Mandingos in Monrovia contributed to mob violence (see Section 1.a.). Ethnic tensions continued in Lofa County between the predominantly Muslim Mandingo ethnic group and the Lorma ethnic group.

Incidents of ritualistic killings increased during the year due to the breakdown of law and order in rural counties, including Maryland County. Little reliable information was readily available about traditions associated with ritualistic killings in which body parts used in traditional indigenous rituals were removed from the victim; however, they continued to occur. The number of such killings was difficult to ascertain, since police often described deaths as accidents even when body parts were removed. It was believed that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups concentrated in the southeastern counties most commonly engaged in ritual killings. The victims were usually members of the religious group performing the ritual, and body parts removed from a member whom the group believed to be powerful were considered to be the most effective ritually. Ritual killings for the purpose of obtaining body parts traditionally were committed by religious group members called "heart men;" however, since the 1990-96 civil war, common criminals also may have sold body parts.

During the first 3 months of the year, there was an increase in the number of mysterious deaths in and around Monrovia, and

residents blamed such deaths on ritualistic killers; however, no evidence was found to support their claim.

Nyema Brooks, Ma-Gbanni, and Dio Tyre Dennis, who were arrested and jailed in 2002 at the Harper Central Prison in Maryland County for the alleged ritualistic killing of 11th grade student Dio Dennis, disappeared from the jail after MODEL captured Harper in May 2003; they were believed to have escaped and fled.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2004 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights; however, the Government sometimes did not respect these rights in practice. As of year's end, government forces effectively controlled most of the country, including all major border crossings. A few small areas remained under the control of former LURD and MODEL combatants. There were reports that government officials harassed, delayed, and extracted bribes from ethnic Mandingos.

At year's end, there were reports that LNP officers had resumed the practice of subjecting travelers to arbitrary searches and petty extortion at checkpoints in and around Monrovia; however, unlike during the previous year, there were no reports that government forces raped travelers or beat and robbed IDPS.

After October riots, the Government imposed a curfew in Monrovia (see Section 1.a.); the curfew was lifted in November.

The Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not use it. Numerous student activists, opposition figures, and human rights activists who fled the country during the civil war due to fear for their personal safety or that of their families returned during the year.

Relief agencies estimated that at year's end, more than 300,000 IDPs remained in camps, settlements, and communities throughout the country as a result of the 1999-2003 civil war. Conditions at most camps were poor, and food, sanitation, and security were inadequate. During the year, the Government worked with international organizations to return IDPs to their homes; however, delays in disarmament, insufficient resources, and lingering perceptions that the Government was unable to provide security beyond Monrovia and major towns hindered these efforts. Thousands of IDPs from Grand Kru, Sinoe, Maryland, and Rivercess counties in the southeast and Lofa and Gbarpolu counties in the northwest had not returned to their homes by year's end due to security concerns, lack of transport, and inadequate support. IDP populations were subject to rape, battery, arbitrary arrest, extortion, and theft perpetuated primarily by former government and rebel combatants who had reorganized as gangs.

Unlike in the previous year, government and rebel militias did not forcibly conscript IDPs to fight against LURD.

Between 250,000 and 300,000 refugees from the country remained in neighboring countries, primarily in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana. Approximately 50,000 refugees have returned to the country without UNHCR assistance; however, many remained in IDP camps due to continuing instability in the country, particularly in rural areas. On September 22, the NTGL, the Government of Ghana, and the UNHCR signed an agreement for the progressive voluntary repatriation of 42,000 Liberian refugees living in Ghana; approximately 450 had been repatriated by year's end.

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, and the Government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. In practice, the Government provided some protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution, and granted refugee status or asylum. The Government generally cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. The Government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol.

Refugees were also subject to abuse, primarily by former government and rebel combatants who had reorganized as gangs.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in 1997 elections that international observers deemed administratively free and transparent; however, the elections were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, because most voters believed that military forces loyal to Taylor would have resumed the 1990-1996 civil war if he had lost. Because the legislative elections were held on the basis of proportional representation, Taylor's NPP won control of the former legislature by the same 75 percent majority that he received in the popular vote for the presidency. Elections to restore constitutional government were scheduled for October 2005.

The CPA, negotiated between the warring parties, the registered political parties, and representatives from civil society, was designed to end several years of active conflict primarily between the Government and LURD. As a political compromise, the CPA suspends certain articles of the Constitution temporarily, but states that articles not in conflict with the CPA remain in effect. The roles of president and vice president were replaced by a chairman and vice chairman, and ministries were apportioned

based on political affiliation. The executive branch is headed by a Chairman and Vice Chairman. Ministerial positions are apportioned between members of the former warring parties, the registered political parties, and civil society. The NTGL has a unicameral legislature, the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA), which replaced the Congress in October 2003; Bryant assumed the role of Chairman.

The NTLA was sometimes susceptible to executive branch influence; however, the legislative branch exercised considerably more independence than it did during the Taylor administration.

The State is highly centralized. The chairman of the NTGL appoints the superintendents (governors) of the 15 counties in consultation with the former warring parties; however, the parties frequently complained that they were not consulted. Municipalities and chieftaincies were supposed to elect their own officials; however, elections--postponed in 1998 and 2003 due to lack of funds and disorganization--were rescheduled for no later than October 2005. Local governments had no independent revenue base and relied entirely on the central Government for funds. As a result, the Government effectively did not function outside of Monrovia and one or two larger towns. Education, health services, and public works were provided by international organizations and NGOs. Local officials served mainly to lobby the central Government.

Unlike in the previous year, the Government generally paid civil service salaries; however, corruption and impunity in the executive and legislative branches were serious problems. Political groups reportedly used bribery to buy the loyalty of various constituencies in anticipation of the scheduled 2005 elections.

The law provides for "no limitation on the public right to be informed about the Government and its functionaries"; however, no procedures for obtaining such information had been established.

Several women held ranking positions in the Government and the NTGL. There were 4 women in the 76-seat legislature, 3 female cabinet Ministers, and 1 woman on the 5-person Supreme Court.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Unlike in previous years, government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views; however, former rebel combatants blocked the delivery of humanitarian supplies.

Domestic human rights organizations were underfunded and understaffed, and their personnel lacked adequate training. There were three coalitions of human rights groups: The National Human Rights Center of Liberia had nine member organizations; eight other groups comprised the Network of Human Rights Chapters; and four belonged to the Federation of Human Rights Organizations. These organizations sought to increase public discussion of human rights problems. During the year, several domestic human rights organizations established branches outside of the capital to visit detainees and prisoners.

During the year, the Government worked to facilitate the free and safe passage of relief supplies by international NGOs and permitted visits by the U.N. Security Council, the ICRC, and various U.N. agencies (see Section 1.c.). However, early in the year, there were several incidents in which former combatants blocked humanitarian assistance or otherwise jeopardized humanitarian relief efforts. In May, a foreign medical relief agency closed its mission after former security forces of the Taylor administration robbed and intimidated the agency.

There were no developments in the 2003 case in which unidentified assailants assaulted and sexually abused three nieces of Ishmael P. Campbell, a human rights advocate and Vice President of the Liberia Bar Association.

During the year, the Government created the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) to monitor compliance with human rights provided for in the CPA and to promote human rights education in the schools, media, police, and military; however, the INCHR was largely ineffective due to insufficient funding.

The CPA created a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to provide a forum for the perpetrators and victims of human rights abuses and to promote reconciliation and rehabilitation; however, the TRC took few actions during the year and was largely ineffective.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinion; however, the Government did not effectively enforce these provisions. There were no laws against gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, or FGM. Differences involving ethnic groups, notably the Krahn, Mano, Gio, Lorma and Mandingo ethnic groups, continued to contribute to serious political violence and abuses.

Women

Domestic violence against women was widespread; however, neither the Government, the courts, nor the media seriously addressed the problem. Several NGOs in Monrovia and Buchanan continued programs to treat abused women and girls and to increase awareness of their rights.

Rape is illegal; however, the Government did not enforce the law, and rape was common, especially in IDP camps (see Section 2.d.). No perpetrators were prosecuted during the year.

FGM traditionally was performed on young girls in northern, western, and central ethnic groups, particularly in rural areas. Because social structures and traditional institutions, such as the secret societies that often performed FGM as an initiation rite, were undermined by the war, many experts believed that the incidence of FGM had dropped to as low as 10 percent. However, since the end of the civil war, traditional societies were reestablishing themselves throughout the country, and the practice of FGM continued. The most extreme form of FGM, infibulation, was not practiced. The Government took no action against FGM during the year, and on July 18, the head of the INCHR publicly condoned FGM on cultural grounds; however, he subsequently attempted to retract his statements.

Prostitution is illegal; however, it was widespread.

Women never recovered from the setbacks caused by the 1990-96 war, when many schools were closed and they were prevented from maintaining their traditional roles in the production, allocation, and sale of food. In the wake of the 1999-2003 civil war, thousands of women remained displaced and prevented from pursuing livelihoods or education.

Women married under civil law can inherit land and property; however, women married under traditional laws are considered the properties of their husbands and are not entitled to inherit from their husbands or retain custody of their children if their husbands die. The Government prohibits polygyny; however, traditional laws permit men to have more than one wife. Women's organizations, particularly AFELL, continued to press for legislation on behalf of inheritance rights in traditional marriages.

During the year, professional women's groups--including lawyers, market women, and businesswomen--remained vocal about their concerns regarding government corruption, the economy, security abuses, rape, domestic violence, and children's rights. Government officials often responded negatively to public criticism.

Children

The Government generally was unable to provide for the education and health of children. Due to the poor condition of government schools, many children who attended school, particularly in Monrovia, went to private institutions. Since many private schools still needed to be refurbished due to wartime damage, school fees remained relatively high, thereby making education unattainable for many school-age children. In both public and private schools, families of children often were asked to provide their own books, pencils, paper, and even desks. According to a 2003 UNICEF report, more than half of school-age children did not attend school.

FGM was performed primarily on young girls (see Section 5, Women).

Child prostitution and trafficking were problems (see Section 5, Trafficking).

More than 11,000 children were disarmed and demobilized during UNMIL's DDDR program. ICRC efforts to reunite children who had been separated from their families during the war, including child soldiers, continued during the year. At year's end, approximately 145 children had been reunited with their families; an estimated 300 children remained scattered within the country and in refugee camps outside of the country. Former child soldiers who turned over their weapons were entitled to a 3-month stay in an Interim Care Center (ICC), which offered medical aid, counseling, reading lessons, and help tracing families. Many children refused to leave the ICCs due to concerns for their personal safety and lack of schools or other support in their communities.

Former rebel combatants continued to forcibly conscript persons, including children, to serve as porters, laborers, and sex slaves; however, unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government forces or former government militias conducted such conscriptions.

Child labor was a problem (see Section 6.d.).

There were thousands of children living on the streets of Monrovia; however, it was difficult to tell who were street children, former combatants, or IDPs. Nearly all youths witnessed atrocities, and some committed atrocities themselves. Approximately 100 underfunded orphanages operated in and around Monrovia; however, many orphans lived outside these institutions. These institutions did not receive any government funding and relied on private donations. In December, the Government closed two orphanages due to "deplorable conditions" and listed another 32 for potential closure.

Trafficking In Persons

The law does not expressly prohibit trafficking in persons, and there were reports that trafficking occurred. During the year, the Government obstructed the prosecution of suspected traffickers.

Penal Code provisions against kidnapping, forced labor, and prostitution could be used to prosecute traffickers; however, the Government did not prosecute anyone for trafficking during the year. In March, members of the Ukrainian state security services repatriated several Ukrainian nationals who they claimed had been trafficked to a local nightclub. In May, LNP and UNMIL's trafficking-in-persons unit arrested the proprietress of the same nightclub on charges of kidnapping three Moroccan women; however, the proprietress was released on bail, and the case was indefinitely suspended due to obstruction by the Magistrate and Criminal Courts, which delayed the presentation of evidence and then the trial by not placing the case on the docket. The Government also refused to prosecute the case unless UNMIL, which does not pay court fees as a matter of policy, paid such fees; UNMIL charged that the Government's refusal was an attempt to avoid action on the case.

NGO estimates of the number of persons trafficked to the country during the year ranged between 20 and several hundred. Victims were trafficked from Morocco, Ukraine, and neighboring countries.

There were reports of forced labor, including by children, and the recruitment of child soldiers (see Section 5, Children, 6.c., and 6.d.). Citizens, including children, reportedly have been trafficked to the Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, in some cases for commercial sexual exploitation.

Persons with Disabilities

It is illegal to discriminate against persons with disabilities; however, in practice, they did not enjoy equal access to public buildings or government services, and no laws mandate such access. As a result of the civil wars, a large number of persons had permanent disabilities, in addition to those disabled by accident or illness. Persons with disabilities faced discrimination, particularly in rural areas. Babies with deformities often were abandoned. Some NGOs provided services to persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although the Constitution prohibits ethnic discrimination, it also provides that only "persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent" may be citizens or own land. Many persons of Lebanese and Asian descent who were born or have lived most of their lives in the country were denied full rights as a result of this racial distinction.

The country has 16 indigenous ethnic groups; each spoke a distinct primary language and was concentrated regionally. No ethnic group constituted a majority of the population.

During the year, ethnic, religious, and other differences between Mandingos and non-Mandingos contributed to mob violence (see Section 1.a.). During the Taylor administration, many Mandingo citizens fled their homes as a result of discrimination, arbitrary arrests, and violence; however, during the year, some Mandingos returned to Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties, which were controlled by the Mandingo-dominated LURD.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides workers, except members of the military and police, the right to associate in trade unions, and workers exercised this right in practice. The Constitution also prohibits unions from engaging in partisan political activity; however, government interference in union activities, especially union elections and leadership struggles, was common both before and during the civil war.

The actual power that the unions exercised was extremely limited. Since the country's work force largely was illiterate, economic activities beyond the subsistence level were very limited, and the labor laws tended to favor management.

The law does not prohibit anti-union discrimination; however, there were no reports of such discrimination during the year.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

With the exception of civil servants, workers have the right to organize and bargain collectively; these rights largely were unused during the year because of the lack of economic activity. There are no export processing zones.

A 1984 People's Redemption Council decree nullified labor laws that provided for the right to strike, but that decree has not been enforced for years. Due to the destruction of the economy and the estimated 70 percent unemployment rate, strikes were infrequent; however, work stoppages related to salary arrears from the former Taylor administration occurred during the year.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, this prohibition was ignored widely in many parts of the country, and there were reports that such practices occurred (see Sections 5 and 6.d.). Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that logging and mining companies forcibly recruited workers; however, in some rural areas, farmers were pressured into providing free labor on "community projects" that often benefited only local leaders. There also were reports that local officials forced convicts to work for them.

During the year, there were reports that former LURD and MODEL combatants used forced labor to serve as porters, sex slaves, and to dig gold and diamonds in their controlled territories.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16 during school hours in the wage sector; however, enforcement was lax, and child labor was a serious and widespread problem. The Ministry of Labor frequently lacked the resources to carry out its mandate. Throughout rural areas, particularly where there were no schools, small children continued to assist their parents as vendors in local markets or on the streets, to take care of younger brothers and sisters, and to work on family subsistence farms.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government security forces forced children to work in the alluvial mining industry; however, some former government and rebel combatants continued the practice. Human rights groups reported instances of forced child labor in some rural areas, particularly in alluvial diamond mining.

There were no developments in the 2002 defamation suit filed by legislators against human rights advocates who published a report on child labor in the southeastern counties.

Rebel combatants continued to forcibly conscript persons, including children, to serve as porters, forced laborers, and sex slaves.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law requires a minimum wage of approximately \$0.20 (10 Id) per hour not exceeding 8 hours per day, excluding benefits, for unskilled laborers. The law requires that agricultural workers be paid \$1.20 (60 Id) for an 8-hour day, excluding benefits. Skilled labor has no minimum fixed wage, but industrial workers usually received three or four times the wage paid to agricultural workers. The highly competitive minimum wage jobs provided a minimal standard of living for a worker and family; however, there were very few such jobs. Families dependent on minimum wage incomes also engaged in subsistence farming, small scale marketing, petty extortion, and begging. Unlike in the previous year, the Government generally paid civil service salaries.

The law provides for a 48-hour, 6-day regular workweek with a 30-minute rest period per 5 hours of work. The 6-day workweek may extend to 56 hours for service occupations and to 72 hours for miners, with overtime pay beyond 48 hours.

The law provides for paid leave, severance benefits, and safety standards, but enforcement was targeted solely against profitable firms that generally observed these standards. There were government-established health and safety standards that the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing; however, the Ministry rarely enforced them. The law does not give workers the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without risking loss of employment.

Due to the country's continued economic problems, most citizens were forced to accept any work they could find regardless of wages or working conditions. The Ministry of Labor claimed it lacked the resources to monitor compliance with labor laws.

The law protects legal, but not illegal, foreign workers.